ARTICLE APPEARED ON PAGE C-72

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
4 June 1986

Attack on SALT-2 is no laughing matter

By LARS-ERIK NELSON

WASHINGTON—From one White House official came a startled giggle. From an intelligence official, there was a serious "Hmmm, that's a good question." From the Arms Control Agency, the answer, after a day of thought, was "Nobody knows the answer to that."

The question that produced this display of mumbles and grins: "Now that President Reagan has thrown out the SALT-2 treaty, what are we going to do if the Russians start concealing their nuclear missile deployments, covering up submarines, spoofing our satellites, hiding data from their missile tests?"

The Reagan administration response: Giggles, "Hmmms" and an uneasy shuffling of feet.

A more serious response from a career State Department official: "If the Russians cheat in the future, we won't have any basis for complaint. There is no standard any longer." Adds a Senate expert: "If they start to conceal their tests, we won't have any right to call them on it."

In the past, if the Russians covered up a nuclear missile silo or encrypted data from a missile test, the United States could challenge them at the Standing Consultative Commission. That forum wasn't perfect, but it did clear up some U.S. misgivings about possible Soviet cheating.

No longer will the Russians be obliged to answer any questions about their strategic nuclear force. By junking SALT-2, Reagan has taken them off the hook.

What the administration has overlooked in its lust to slay the "fatally flawed" treaty, is that SALT-2 was two treaties—a U.S.-Soviet intelligence agreement, and a cap on nuclear weapons.

As an intelligence treaty, SALT-2 worked overwhelmingly to the advantage of the U.S. It obliged the Soviets to maintain an "open skies" policy for sophisticated U.S. satellites. It forced the Soviet military to be less secretive than it prefers.

Article 15 said, "Each party undertakes not to use deliberate concealment measures which impede verification . . . of compliance with the provisions of this treaty."

The ban on concealment applied equally to the U.S. and the Soviet Union but, as former CIA director Stansfield Turner said in an interview, "There is an asymmetry in need"—i.e., we needed satellite and signals information far more than the Russians did, and SALT-2 guaranteed it for us.

Not any more. Where once we used to complain that the Russians encrypted some of the telemetry (radio data) from their missile tests, now they are free to encrypt all of it. "We've thrown out the baby with the bathwater," says former National Security Council expert Roger Molander.

Reagan's SALT-2 decision has been a triple play: It has antagonized the European allies, it has given the Russians freedom to return, if they choose, to a nuclear build-up in total secrecy—and it has united Democrats on an arms-control policy.

The first challenge to Reagan's decision will come next month—not from the Russians, but from House Democrats preparing legislation to bar him from spending any money to violate the limits on SALT-2.

Under the plan, engineered by Rep. Les AuCoin (D-Ore.), Reagan would have to abide by SALT-2 ceilings as long as the Russians do. It is a strategy that short-circuits the Constitution—but it has worked before: Last December, AuCoin used the power of the purse to force the administration not to test antisatellite weapons as long as the Russians don't.

NEXT MONTH, House Democrats will submit a bill to force Reagan to dismantle Minuteman missiles if he proceeds with his plan to arm more B-52 bombers with cruise missiles. Normally, such extra-Constitutional diplomacy wouldn't have a prayer. But the Democrats are concluding, in the words of one staffer, that Reagan's tough-sounding policies "really don't protect this country's national security."